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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED CAPTION)

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KPKO
SUBJECT: FM BANGURA MEETING WITH A-S CARSON

REF: A. FREETOWN 95 B. FREETOWN 99 C. STATE 64023

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Summary and Background

1. (SBU) On June 9, Zainab Bangura, the Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, met with A/S Johnnie Carson to discuss problems in the West Africa region, the threat of instability in Guinea to Sierra Leone and domestic issues, particularly, narcotics and the need for both of Sierra Leone's major political parties to begin a dialogue. Bangura emphasized that Sierra Leone had stood by the U.S. on such issues as Kosovo and Zimbabwe on principle, and had turned over narcotics traffickers to the DEA (despite some internal APC opposition). In return, she said the government would like some concrete signs of support from the Administration. A/S Carson expressed his thanks to the GoSL and the Foreign Minister for their friendship and collaboration with the U.S. on many issues and told her that the USG will do as much as we can to assist and support Sierra Leone.

2. (U) Background: The participants were Sierra Leonean Foreign Minister Zainab Bangura; Ibrahim Conteh, DCM of the Sierra Leone embassy; Sheku Mesali, Counselor at the Sierra Leone embassy; A/S Johnnie Carson; Ambassador to Sierra Leone June Carter Perry, INR/AF Analyst for West Africa Bernadette Graves; and AF/W Acting Deputy Director, Jim Hunter, as notetaker. FM Bangura was in the U.S. to attend a regularly scheduled meeting in New York of the UN Peace Building Commission (UN PBC). The UN PBC is active in Sierra Leone.

End Summary and Background.

Africa is Falling Behind -- Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal

3. (SBU) On June 9, Zainab Bangura, the Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, held an introductory meeting with A/S Johnnie Carson to discuss Bangura's concerns that Africa, including West Africa, seemed to be moving backward on democracy. She gave A/S Carson a brief readout on some of the salient issues in West African countries and noted the completion of the voter registration process in Cote d'Ivoire. She observed that in Nigeria no one seems to be in charge and it is difficult to get the Nigerians to make a decision while the Yar'Adua succession crisis plays out; in Ghana former president Jerry Rawlings is the de facto president due to President Mills' poor health; President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal is becoming a problem, as he does not want to leave office despite growing domestic opposition; and Guinea-Bissau is a collapsed state

dominated
by the military that requires extensive security sector
reform before it can democratize.

Guinea: Entice with Aid Better than Confrontation

¶4. (SBU) Bangura said that Guinea's instability is a big problem for Sierra Leone, as Sierra Leone has a long border with Guinea and more Guinean immigrants than any other West African state. The GoSL, President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia, and President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas all very much doubt elections will be held on schedule. She said that everyone is afraid of the erratic Captain Dadis Camara, leader of Guinea's ruling junta. Bangura warned that a cut off in aid to Guinea could trigger a rampage by the large Guinean military. Instead, the GoSL would prefer to offer aid in exchange for political progress.

Sierra Leone: Narcotics a Growing Threat, Pol Parties Must Begin Dialogue

¶5. (SBU) Turning to domestic issues, Bangura expressed alarmed at the rapid growth of marijuana cultivation in Liberia and Sierra Leone. She said that the GoSL has enacted good anti-drug laws but needs more information sharing with the U.S. Sierra Leone's youth unemployment

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problem exacerbates Sierra Leone's drug trafficking problem and raises the risk of serious instability. Unemployed young people joined in the rioting between supporters of the ruling All Peoples Congress (APC) and the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) on March 13 and 16 (reftels A and B). Bangura opined that the riots were a wakeup call that the hardliners in both parties are growing more influential and feeding off of each other's actions. She noted that the parties need to start a dialogue, rather than viewing each other as enemies. She also said that it was GoSL policy that those convicted of war crimes by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) serve their sentences outside of Sierra Leone, as their presence in Sierra Leone would be destabilizing.

Sierra Leone-U.S.: Show Us the Love

¶6. (SBU) Bangura emphasized that Sierra Leone had stood by the U.S. on such issues as Kosovo and Zimbabwe on principle, turned over narcotics traffickers to the DEA (despite some internal APC opposition). In return, she said the government would like some concrete signs of support from the Administration, such as high-level visits, more aid money, etc. Such deliverables would reinforce the position of the progressive, pro-U.S. faction within the GoSL.

A/S Carson: We Will Assist As Much As We Can

¶7. (SBU) A/S Carson expressed his thanks to the GoSL and the Foreign Minister for their friendship and collaboration with the U.S. on many issues, especially countering narcotics trafficking and Sierra Leone's recognition of Kosovo. He stated that the USG will do as much as we can to assist and support Sierra Leone and its democratic progress, and acknowledged GoSL desire for a visible demonstration of that support, such as a high-level visit. He added that our shared ideals, principles and values are the basis for our collaboration. He said the United States is concerned about democracy, economic growth, governance and stability in West Africa. In particular, he noted concern about political violence and erratic leadership in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea. He

expressed hope that ECOWAS can assist with Guinea's democratic transition and that the tensions between Sierra Leone's two major parties can be resolved peacefully.

Comment

18. (SBU) Bangura's statement that it is GoSL policy to have the convicted defendants of the SCSL serve their terms outside of Sierra Leone was welcome, as the USG shares that goal. While Sierra Leone shares our goal of a democratic Guinea, the GoSL's first priority is a stable Guinea, leading the GoSL to take a softer line on Guinea than we would like. Other Guinean neighbors, including Liberia, are taking a similarly restrained approach.
CLINTON